



So, got the john boat, poles, lures. Where are the fish?

Photo by Judy Bader

# The Sycamore Islander

September 2004

Volume 83 No. 9

## President's Message

I know many of you are curious as to what the new quarters will look like, and how it will change the character of the Clubhouse. Your interest and concern is clearly and deeply understood. Unfortunately, the Building Committee is so mired in county regulations that we have been unable to develop one design concept that we are sure we can build. Johnna Robinson has written a description of the main concepts because she knows how much you care about this issue. [See page three of this issue.]

In general, we have ascertained that the county does not permit new construction in a floodplain. We have also learned that, because the clubhouse predates the current zoning and building codes, we are allowed to maintain the existing usage within the current structure. This includes the possibility of reconfiguring the space, provided that we do not increase the total living area. However, by doing improvements and/or extensions, we are opening ourselves up to requirements of the current building codes.

We also know that there is a variance process through which we can appeal the reasons for rejection. For example, regulations for a club include parking, compliance with fire codes (e.g., sprinkler systems and fire-resistant stairways), or building within 30 feet of the well. We are reasonably certain that we can get a variance so that we don't have to build a parking lot! But we have less confidence about a lot of the other issues, of which the possibility of building in a floodplain appears to be the biggest one. Many of the other restrictions (e.g., the well and septic regulations) are based upon this one. Before we invest much time in one of the design concepts Johnna describes, we need to know whether there is any possibility at all that we could build it.

We have had one meeting and several conversations with Martin Klauber, the People's Counsel. He is an employee of Montgomery County, and his job is to assist people through the variance process. He lives in our neighborhood, and is quite excited to be helping us. He has started the wheels turning to find out whether a variance has ever been, or could ever be, granted to allow building in a floodplain. Hopefully, we will have our answer soon, and will be able to move quickly after that.

At our next meeting, we will have as our guest Dean Brenneman, an architect and one of the new owners of the Sycamore Store. Sherry Pettie wrote a detailed article about their plans in the last issue of the *Islander*. Please come hear him at 8:00 on September 8. Or come early and have a picnic dinner with Mr. Brenneman, his wife, and me.

— Ann Marie Cunningham

## September Meeting

Wednesday, September 8, 8 p.m.  
At the Island!

Special Guest: Dean Brenneman, one of  
the new owners of the Sycamore Store

**The Sycamore Islander** is a monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. Articles, photographic essays, drawings, announcements, letters to the editors—any materials of interest to the membership and waiting list—are welcome and should be sent to the Editor, Norman Metzger, 638 G Street, SE, Washington, DC 20003-2724 or by fax to 202/544-6027. Text and graphics may be sent as e-mail attachments to [normanmetzger@verizon.net](mailto:normanmetzger@verizon.net). Telephone: 202/544-6027 or 202/445-5436 (cell). **Note to submitters of announcements, articles, or letters: The deadline for the October issue is receipt at the Editor's address by Monday, Sept. 20th. Earlier submissions receive priority.**

## From Holly Syrrakos, Archivist: 75 Years Ago At Sycamore Island

### Selections from the September 1929 *Sycamore Islander*

Just coming off the Summer Olympics helps us to appreciate the 1929 Sycamore Labor Day Regatta.

“Sycamore Takes Labor Day Regatta Without Difficulty”

“Which wasn’t so remarkable, since there were no entrants from any of the other Broadwater organizations. Although the regatta committee made several canvasses of the possible contestants along the Broadwater and although we had been assured only a few days before the races that at least two camps would enter strong contenders, no contenders appeared, even though members of these two camps were on hand as spectators. However, the lack of outside competition did not detract one bit from the excitement of the regatta—we had plenty of competition right in our own club, in fact, this year’s regatta stirred up considerably more interest among the membership than did last year’s regatta and many more members entered the events than did last year.”

The account describing the competitors continues, but the following section stands out.

“...The next event, the ladies’ fours, was probably the most interesting event of the day. This event was only arranged on the previous day but all the girls wanted to get in it and three crews were recruited without any difficulty whatsoever. The girls in the winning boat were Elizabeth Blakemore, Edith Gray, Ruth Gessford and Esther Cole. Alice Whitman, Dena Thomson, Mildred Lowenstein and Miss Bell were in the second boat, and a close second it was. The third boat load of lady experts was not far behind, containing Edna Thomas, Marion Miller, Miss Booth and Mrs. Whitman. Honest, folks, if you didn’t see this race, you’ve no idea how well our wives and girl friends paddle.”

The first place winners received silver medals and the seconds, bronze. [But I bet they didn’t get those cool laurel wreaths to wear on their heads.]



# Plans for the Quarters and Clubhouse

By Johnna Robinson

A number of ideas have been floated for moving the caretaker's quarters up to a safer level above the river. Basically there are three ideas, though the details have yet to be agreed upon.

Plan A (Wiebenson Plan). Build the caretaker a new kitchen, bathroom and bedroom (perhaps with an office) on the level with the clubhouse and put it mostly in the same place, but above the current quarters. The problems are that the permitting office won't like us building outside the current 'footprint', and the addition would look awkward from the towpath side. The advantage of this plan is that it would be considerably cheaper than the other plans. The quarters' living room would stay the same. The current quarters' kitchen, bathroom and bedroom would be demolished and the area under the addition would be open.

Plan B (Tryon's Plan). Refurbish the current ground-level quarters into a bedroom and office, taking care that no vital equipment would be on that level. Tear out the club kitchen and make it into the Caretaker's dining area, bathroom, laundry area, kitchen and storage. The club house wall would be soundproofed. Tear out the women's locker room, open this, including north windows, to the clubhouse area and put a new club kitchen where the women's bathrooms now are. New women's toilets and lockers would be installed in the men's locker area. Advantages are that it would be easier to get a permit and Club members would have an enhanced club room; the disadvantage would be the proximity of the caretaker to the clubhouse areas. The new kitchen would attempt to keep the 'retro' look.

Plan C (All Upstairs Plan). Refurbish the low quarters into a women's locker room and use the bathroom on this level. Put the caretaker's kitchen, bathroom, laundry, dining, etc. in the current club kitchen area, and put a bedroom and an office in the current women's locker room. Then build a new club kitchen in the current women's bathroom area. This plan is the most expensive, but would probably pass muster with the building permit office. It also gets all of the caretaker's area above the medium floods. The disadvantage is that the clubhouse areas would be compromised.

All plans will include items that will bring the building up to current code. Plans B and C will refurbish the members' areas.

This outline leaves out a lot of details, i.e., what kind of heating/ac, problems with insulation and sound-proofing, what existing items can be reused, etc. There are also issues with redoing the lower level of the clubhouse/quarters, i.e., high water considerations and repairs of earlier flood damage. If you have comments, call Johnna Robinson at (301)229-5421. I will take notes and pass all comments on to Jack Sanders, the Building Committee chairman.

Estimates vary, but Plan C would be the most expensive, Plan B slightly less, and Plan A the least costly. It will take some sort of assessment from each member family to do this, perhaps payable over several years. Specific numbers will not be available until the final plan is sketched out in more detail.

Things can change, but at this time these are the most discussed ideas. The Building Committee will be able to recommend a plan they think is most advantageous for the Club in the long run. Any plan will, of course, have to be approved by the Montgomery County Permitting Office. The membership would have to vote on any special assessment.

# Family Traditions

By Donna Messersmith Jones

When our son Greg was born, almost ten years ago, Tryon Wells, my husband Steve's lifelong friend, said "If you want to be members of Sycamore Island one day, and bring your kids and their friends, you better get on the waiting list now!" I took his advice, and while Greg and our daughter Melanie were growing up, in the back of my mind, I often thought about a day when we'd be members and bring a group of the kids' friends to explore the island.

Saturday, June 12<sup>th</sup> was the day, at last. Eight boys and girls from our Camp Fire kids group and their families came to Sycamore for exploring, canoeing, picnicking and swimming. Just after landing on the shore, the kids dashed off in groups to explore the island. I heard shouts exclaiming, "Come here! We found a treehouse!" I was reminded of those days of discovery when my sisters and I explored the woods behind our house. Our discoveries were just that—"ours"—regardless of whether a thousand other kids had already found what we had found.



Nathaniel Rees, Christopher Root, and Donna Messersmith Jones begin our canoe trip.

The kids were anxious to take a canoe trip—for many it was their first time in a canoe. But they had heard lots of stories: how Grandpa Phil Jones had paddled a canoe across the river to his work at the CIA and how Christopher Root's Grandpa had also been a member in the 60's and spent many days canoeing too. Nathaniel Rees and Christopher paddled in my canoe. Paddling for me was second nature, and I'd forgotten how an enthusiastic boy trying to paddle as quickly as possible can easily get into the most awkward of positions with hands and arms twisted around the paddle. I explained an easier way to paddle, and we made our way to Ruppert's Island.

We all shared a picnic lunch and most of the families had to leave for the ever-present Saturday soccer games. But my daughter Melanie and her friend

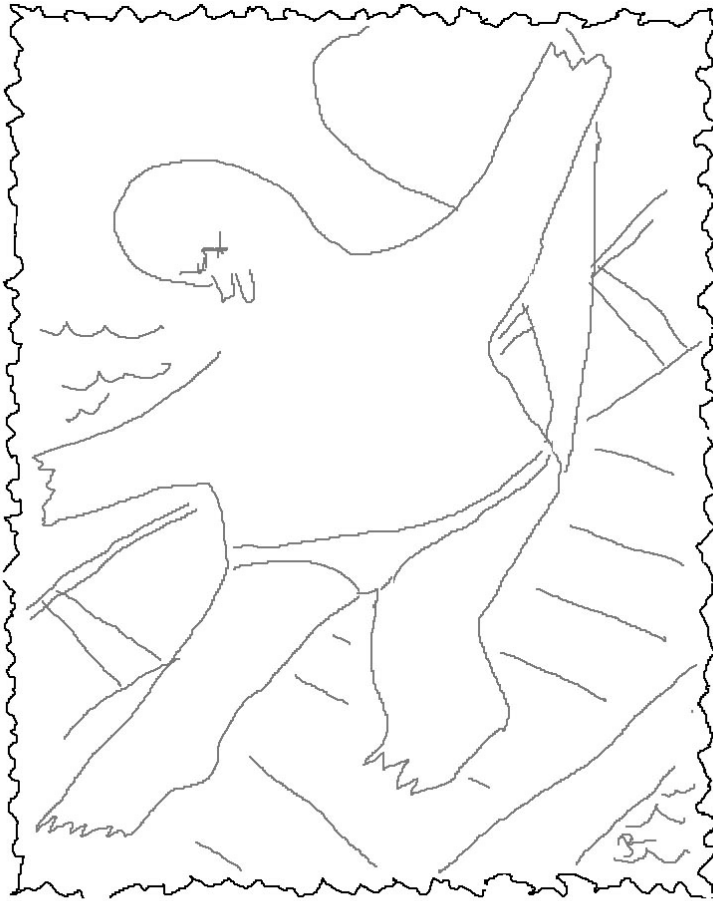


Melanie Jones, Rita and Carissa Cordero playing in mud at the river's edge.

Annie Schmidt and her mom Lisa Kaeser could stay. Melanie and Annie put on lifejackets and spent what seemed like an endless time floating and swimming in the river. They made up games in the current, so unlike the feel of a swimming pool. My parents, Sherry and Don Messersmith, and my sister Heidi and her family, joined us at the swimming float. Heidi's daughters, Rita (4) and Carissa (2), alternated between watching Melanie and Annie from the float and heading back to shore to sink up to their knees in mud. Heidi and I looked at the slippery deck and put lifejackets on Rita and Carissa. Sure enough, just a few moments later, Rita slipped unexpectedly into the water and over her head. In a second, I scooped her up, but she clearly was surprised. We avoided any tears, however, by me joining her in the "game"—wearing all my clothes and adding a lifejacket, I asked Rita if she wanted to go back in with me to "swim"! She sure did, like the big girls. Carissa wanted to do the same, so for a long time, we all took turns. I can still hear the squeals and giggles of my nieces in my arms as we floated without a care in the river, my own daughter giggling nearby.

Not so many years ago, we'd visited the island with our Grandpa Phil. But this day seemed to solidify the changes we were facing: Grandma Jinny was dying of cancer and Grandpa Phil couldn't make it down the path anymore. My own kids were too old for me to hold anymore, and reveled in the independence the island allows. Two days later, Grandma Jinny died, and a very tough summer of transitions began. But for that one day, we all basked in the sunlight and breezes of the island. Perhaps the torch of family traditions was being passed to a younger generation.

Photos by Sherry Messersmith



## *Ruppert*

*—Created by  
Johnna Robinson*

*Ruppert surfs the old ferry,  
Islanders get wet feet.*

### **Correction**

"I just read the August 2004 issue, and wanted to point out something in Johnna Robinson's piece about Ken Fassler. The background information on Ken was interesting and the friendly send-off for Ken was very fitting; but I noticed that she wrote, 'Ken's handiwork can be seen in the marvelous zigzag-edge walkway and in the behind the scenes Baba Yar shed.'

"I think Ms. Robinson intended to say a 'Baba Yaga' shed, meaning a shed like the hut of the witch, Baba Yaga, from Russian fairy tales. (The illustration here is from Genevra Gerhart's book *The Russian's World*.) As Ms Gerhart explains in the caption, the use of tree stumps at the foundation corners of peasant houses must have inspired the folk stories of 'the hut on chicken legs.'



"On the other hand, 'Babi Yar' is a large ravine in northwest Kiev that was the site of a massacre of Jews by the Nazis in September 1941. It is the subject of a famous poem by Russian poet, Yevgeny Yevtushenko."

— Leah Hertz

# The 2004 Fishing Derby Much fish, Great Food, One Victim

Article and photos by Judy Bader

On August 21 at 8:00 a.m., Sycamore Island's Third Annual Fishing Derby got underway, led magnificently once again by George and Shelley Malusky. About 40 members and guests participated in the fishing, birding, canoeing, games, contests, and breakfast/lunch festivities. No one cared that it drizzled lightly on and off all morning. Some groups fished from canoes and John boats, others from the captain's float and the 2 swimming docks. The canoe and john boat fishers



seemed catch more fish, but they certainly didn't have more fun.



There were great prizes (wonderfully decorated boxes of great local fishing flies) for specific achievements: ugliest fish, most fish, largest fish, most variety of fish, smallest fish. The youngest winner was Rosie Pollack, 4, who caught 3 fish from the captain's float. Species caught during the derby include blue gill, sun, catfish and small mouth. One of the winners returned to Sycamore Island with lots of fish but also a nasty snag of his knee by an errant fly barb.



The hook was temporarily bandaged over and later retrieved at a local ER after the derby ended. The hardy fisherman stayed for lunch and received his award, before exiting for the extraction. His priorities were intact, even if his flies were not. A breakfast of Dunkin' Donuts and coffee greeted the early bird fishermen. Lunch was outstanding: sodas, lemonade, outdoor grilled hamburgers, hot dogs, chicken, lots of extras and great desserts. The Sycamore Island Club T-shirts also sold briskly to young and old.



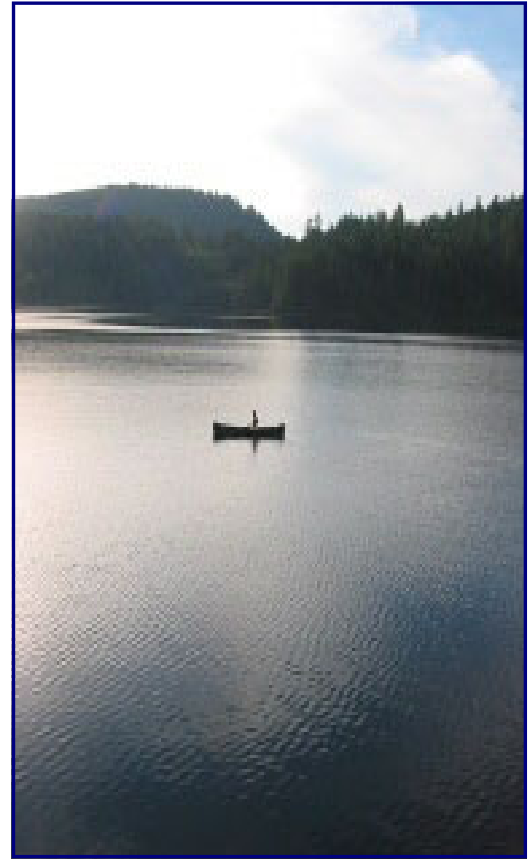
The children had a ball. George Malusky, as always, shared his enthusiasm, expertise, and equipment with all the kids. Shelley organized the kids and the terrific lunch. After fishing the kids played games upstairs (pool, cards) and on the lawn (casting for accuracy inside the rope circle). One favorite was racing Joe Hage's speedy battery-powered, plastic fisherman-in-a-boat off the captain's dock. Another was fishing for plastic flies in a small, rotating (battery powered) round

plastic fishing pool. All in all everyone had fun, met new friends, and promised to return again next year. Special thanks again to George and Shelley. They are great hosts!

## In Touch With Joe...

So how does someone who lives and works at a canoe club on an island spend his vacation? He goes canoe camping to an island of course. This wasn't just any island that I visited, it was an island on an island that you can only get to via another island. Lots of ferries, islands, water and canoes. What could be better?

Canoe camping was only one of the highlights of Jenny's and my trip to British Columbia, but it was our best chance at getting away from the crowds and city lights. We rented a canoe in Campbell River, a small city on the east coast of Vancouver Island. From there we took a ferry over to smaller, Quadra Island and from there drove to the put-in. We loaded our gear and set off paddling past the summer homes and swimmers of Mini Lake. Two hours of easy paddling found us on the still waters of Main Lake. After a swim in the crystal clear, glacier-fed lake we sat and watched the sunset and listened to the loons calling out across the water. When the last rays of the sun had faded we were treated to a magnificent sky full of stars. The calls of the loon were now replaced by the hoots of a barred owl.



Afloat in British Columbia Photo by Joe Hage

There was great turn out for the Fishing Derby on Saturday. Congratulations to all the prizewinners and a big THANK YOU to the Maluskys for hosting another super party.

I also want to thank Sea and David Sitomer for being such caregiving caretakers while I was away. Everyone seems to enjoy having such gracious hosts living on the island.

Late summer flowers are blooming red, purple, and yellow. The walnut trees are shedding their yellow leaves and the Paw Paw trees are bearing their large green fruit. The first signs of autumn.

## More Scenes from the Fishing Derby. Photos by Judy Bader



# MudFest

## Labor Day 2004

A rumor is circulating around the water fountain here at Sycamore Island Headquarters that a flurry of activity has erupted in the lofty towers of the Executive wing. "Could it be?" they cry, "Could it be that the Board of Directors is preparing to re-open the waiting list?"

Alas, no. But something is brewing there in the stately administrative offices of SycId Corp. Not comfort for all the people, perhaps, but something at least for the elect who have already secured a place on that swollen catalog of the faithful. Again this year, waiting-list novices will gather on the Stygian banks, like departed souls awaiting Charon to ferry them to the misty land guarded by the bloodthirsty, multi-headed dog, Cerberus, who devours all who violate his arcane rules. (That is a myth. The Bylaws exclude dogs from the Island). The big day is the first Monday of September. It is ironic that the event takes place on a day named for labor, because this is the only celebration of the year wherein constituents of The Waiting List may set foot on Sycamore Island for activities that entail no work. Starting at 1:32pm and lasting until dark, the Island will crawl with perhaps dozens of limicolous citizens savoring the day and competing for prizes, including:

**A treasure hunt** - in which we learn to navigate our way safely around Sycamore Island and its environs and learn where valuable facilities are located.

**Skits and poetical readings** performed before live audiences.

**Events**, in which participant teams have the opportunity to create useful, or at least unusual objects from Sycamore Island mud. Raw materials provided.

**Criticism** offered gratis to all contestants by non-participating judges,

**Fashion show and parental photo-op** exploring the ornamental applications of abundantly available raw materials, notably mud.

**Science experiments**, including a spectacular pyrotechnic demonstration of the combustible constituents of mud. Really.

**Fishing competition** in which all equipment is provided free by the Club.

**Restocking** of the native piscine fauna of the Potomac with artificially cultivated native live animals.

**Prizes**, to include the **Grand Prix de SycId**: a beautiful pirate-like sword, sharp and keen, carved in perfect proportions and intricate detail, set in a transparent jewel-like material. Guaranteed genuine.

**Pizza**. Free. You should bring anything else you would like to eat and drink, and, hopefully, enough of something to share with others harboring comparable appetites.

**An Ideal Snack for kids**: a largely synthetic but arguably edible substance resembling the Sycamore Island beachfront, appalling to adults, but proclaimed by kids to be delicious. Contains dehydrated cane juice.

Parents are cautioned that children are welcome, but only those accompanied throughout the entire festival by responsible adults.

\*\*

N.B. The Editor emphatically cedes all "credit" for this announcement to W.C. Banta



## Saturday Relief Caretakers September—October

September 4, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Alissa Stern and Louis Boorstin	301-229-4573
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Martha Foley	240-631-1514
September 11, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Richard Boltuck and Misook Yu	301-320-0349
	2:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
September 18, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Gavin and Claire Bloch	301-320-0060
September 25, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Phoebe Hamill	571-259-7640
	2:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
October 2, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	2:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
October 9, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	2:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
October 16, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	2:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
October 23, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	2:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
October 30, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	Bill Richardson	703-892-6944
	2:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	

### \*\*\* Caretaker Volunteers \*\*\*

To volunteer for Saturday relief caretaking, call Candy Means: 301-320-5270.  
Volunteers from the waiting list are encouraged. It's a great way to spend time on the Island!

### Large Parties

Date	Time	Who	What
Sept. 21	11 am	David and Jane Winer	Summer Garden Club, 20 members
Sept. 23	9:30 am—2:30 pm	Abigail Wiebenson	Lowell School Retreat. 100 participants (approved by Board)

A large party application form may be printed from the Club's web page at  
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/systems.htm>

— or —

To request a form through the mail, call the Supervisor of Parties, John Noble  
e-mail: [jnoble@shs.net](mailto:jnoble@shs.net), phone: 240-747-4810, fax: 301-320-4216



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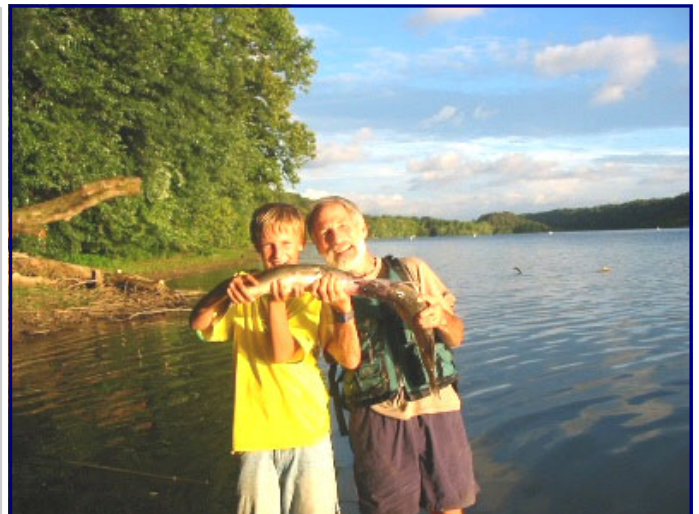
To view this month's Sycamore Islander on the Internet, go to:

<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/max/islander.htm>

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### **September 2004**

- Fishing Derby
- Family Traditions
- Building Options
- Medaling in Canoeing, 1929 Style
- The 2004 Mudfest
- Baba Yaga



Earned Triumph: Jesse Pollak (l) and Richard Lodish  
Photo by Sarah Duggin